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C O N F I D E N T I A L VILNIUS 001032

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TAGS: PREL MARR LH LT

SUBJECT: LITHUANIA LOOKS TOWARDS RIGA SUMMIT

REF: STATE 186256

Classified By: Ambassador John Cloud for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Looking towards the Riga Summit, Lithuania hopes for encouraging words on Baltic air policing and NATO enlargement. The GOL remains committed to success in Afghanistan, where it may redeploy special forces in 2007. End Summary.

Lithuania considering sending SOF to Afghanistan

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¶2. (C) Defense Undersecretary Renatas Norkus told Ambassador November 15 that Lithuania is considering options to send special operations forces (SOF) to Afghanistan in the second part of 2007. He said that one option is to send SOF to Ghor, where Lithuania leads a Provincial Reconstruction Team, if the situation there deteriorates. Other options include sending a squadron to the UK's PRTs in Helmand or to Northwestern Afghanistan. Norkus added that Lithuania may send a SOF detachment of 12 as a security detail for the Lithuanian Ambassador in Kabul, although this would be in addition to another SOF deployment, not an alternative. Ambassador stressed that Afghanistan will be the U.S.'s top priority at the Riga Summit, and we hoped Lithuania could announce its commitment of SOF in Riga.

¶3. (C) Norkus reiterated that "Afghanistan is priority number one" among Lithuania's international missions. Lithuania is set to take on complete financial responsibility for the PRT in January 2007. "You won't get another letter from our Minister asking for an extension of U.S. funding," Norkus said. He expressed hope that the parliament would approve a rise in the civilian assistance budget for Afghanistan as well. (PM Kirkilas anticipated such an outcome in a discussion with the Ambassador on 11/14.) While praising an overall increase in Lithuania's defense spending, Norkus commented that Lithuania had financial constraints on its overseas missions and domestic defense transformation goals. He added that an eventual reduction of Lithuania's engagement in Iraq could also have positive effects on the level of its engagement in Afghanistan.

¶4. (C) Drawing on reftel points, Ambassador reiterated our desire to eliminate national caveats on ISAF forces. Norkus defended Lithuania's two caveats as having no effect on Lithuania's activities. That the PRT cannot operate outside Ghor was a question of capacity, not a political caveat, he said. The caveat excluding counternarcotics operations was redundant according to Norkus, since the ISAF mission does not include such operations. Norkus pointed out that when Lithuania had SOF in Afghanistan, they had no caveats, and Lithuania would likely keep the same policy for future SOF deployments.

Riga Summit Communique

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¶ 15. (C) Norkus outlined three broad areas of concern about the Riga Summit Communiqué. Lithuania wants the Communiqué to describe NATO as the "Preeminent Transatlantic Security Institution," define Article Five as the cornerstone of NATO, and endorse "open door" principles for enlargement. Norkus said that the initial draft communiqué had better language than subsequent drafts about NATO being the most important transatlantic security institution. The Article Five language looked "safe" he said, and Lithuania supports positive language for MAP countries Croatia, Albania and Macedonia as well as Georgia in the communiqué.

Lithuania: "Perhaps don't mention MAP for Ukraine"

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¶ 16. (C) Lithuania's strong support for Ukraine's integration with NATO notwithstanding, they do not support retaining MAP language for Ukraine at Riga. Lithuania is a strong advocate of Ukraine's engagement with NATO: the President and Defense Minister were in Ukraine November 14-15 encouraging closer engagement. But they believe that publicly encouraging MAP for Ukraine during the Riga Summit could precipitate a Ukrainian referendum on NATO as early as next year, which would surely result in a rejection. The MFA's NATO Division Head told us earlier that President Adamkus told NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer during the latter's

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November 10 visit to Vilnius that Yanukovych could very well be the one to ultimately lead Ukraine to NATO, pointing out that as the unlikely NATO supporter Yanukovych was best positioned to consolidate opinion in support of NATO membership.

Lithuania seeks to Extend Air Policing Mission

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¶ 17. (C) Norkus emphasized the political importance of NATO's Baltic Air Policing Mission. He acknowledged that in 10-15 years, the political demand for constant air policing would likely diminish, but said that any change in the 24/7 air policing mission now would result in calls for Lithuania to buy its own aircraft. If NATO changes to a threat-based air-policing policy that does not provide 24/7 coverage of the Baltic states, "there is a de facto double standard," he said. He went on to say that, since the mission began, the nature of air space violations has changed. Recent violations have been brief intrusions into air space in border areas, whereas in the past, he said, Russian aircraft flew across Lithuanian territory. "Removing air-policing now," he said, "would put the NATO standard back to sending diplomatic notes (to Russia) once they have already flown over our territory, as we did before we joined NATO."

¶ 18. (C) Norkus pointed out that SYG de Hoop Scheffer made comments during his Vilnius visit that Baltic air policing should continue, and Norkus asked if the USG could make a similar statement of support. The MFA's NATO Division Head told us the day before that de Hoop Scheffer told President Adamkus privately that he was committed to the continuation of the NATO Baltic Air Policing Mission during his term as Secretary General.

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Lithuania moving cautiously towards long-term solution

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¶ 19. (C) Lithuania is trying to build support for the extension of NATO's Baltic Air Policing by bilaterally soliciting contributions to fill future rotations, including from the United States. Norwegian and Danish Defense Ministers publicly announced their commitment to fill future rotations at the November 8 Nordic/Baltic Defense ministerial. Norkus told us that Lithuania has already lined up 28 months of air policing for future rotations with contributions from Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, and the Czech

Republic. MFA NATO Division Head told us November 14 that once Lithuania has filled contributions through 2011, he said, Lithuania may then choose to push for a decision on their proposal to extend air-policing through 2018, or may choose to continue by having periodic force generation conferences and extending the Interim Solution on a yearly basis.

Trying to make air policing more comfortable

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¶10. (C) Norkus added that Lithuania is striving to make air policing cheaper for allied squadrons. It is considering using one of its new C-27s to provide transport for contributors, and is also considering permanent upgrades at the base to reduce the burden on contributors. The coordinated Baltic 2018 strategy calls for the development of air bases in Latvia and Estonia as well, although those governments still have significant work to do to develop those bases, he said.

Strategic Air Lift Initiative

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¶11. (C) Lithuania strongly supports the Strategic Airlift Initiative and is happy to be part of this initiative that fills a shortfall in NATO capacity, Norkus told the Ambassador. He said that language appearing in the communique about the initiative has "watered down" its tie to NATO, which is not helpful to the Ministry. He said that identifying this initiative very clearly as a NATO initiative was crucial to the Ministry's press strategy in selling the commitment. He added that of the several payment formulae now on the table for the project, the thirty-year payment plan does not appear to be the most popular, although Lithuania needs those terms. Lithuania cannot afford to pay off the aircraft in only a few years.

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